



2021 National George Texido Legislative Officer of the Year

Lt. Col. Frank Birt, New York Wing

Civil Air Patrol volunteer Lt. Col. Frank Birt recruited 19 new members for the New York wing's legislative squadron, growing the unit by 50% from 19 to 38 members. Serving as the wing's government relations advisor, his tireless actions to recruit additional legislative partners for the wing resulted in a complete reinvigoration of the squadron. To capitalize on the renewed interest in Civil Air Patrol (CAP), Birt secured a new commander for the squadron, Assembly Member Donna Lupardo. The squadron had been without a commander and "face" for a number of years, and thanks to Birt, Maj. Lupardo took command in June of 2021. Birt also spearheaded her promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Since taking command, Lupardo has reenergized the squadron and, for the first time ever, New York wing has a true group of interested and invested legislative partners. This would not have happened without the hard work and dedication of Birt. In an effort to keep members informed, Birt created a legislative squadron newsletter that is circulated on a recurring basis, keeping them informed of the wing's support to the state, as well as its accomplishments. Birt's efforts to rebuild and reinvigorate the legislative squadron immediately began to yield results. In 2021, the wing submitted a sizable grant request, which had the support of Lupardo and her legislative squadron colleagues. They are working the grant request as a collective member item vs. a single member request, substantially increasing the chances for approval. New York Wing has never enjoyed collective support in the state legislature. This support is a direct result of Birt's efforts, the relationship he has built with legislative squadron commander, and his proactive communication with other members of the squadron and the legislature as a whole.

In addition, due to the direct engagement and efforts of Birt, on October 8, 2021, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul signed Assembly Bill 1414A into law. This is an act amending state Civil Service Law, in relation to paid leave for members of CAP. The bill had been introduced since 2009 and had always "died" in committee. Lupardo introduced 1414 in the 2021-2022 legislative session, and Senator (Maj.) John Brooks introduced S4719, the senate version of the bill. After being amended to apply to missions during a declared disaster, it passed various committees in both chambers, and on June 2 passed unanimously in both the Assembly and Senate. This was a tremendous victory for New York Wing, and something that would not have happened without Birt's dogged determination. He tirelessly worked this effort, spending countless hours in meetings/phone calls/emails communicating with members of the legislature to garner the support needed to finally push this over a decade long effort across the finish line. The new law states "Employees of the state and public officers who are members of CAP shall be entitled to paid leave to participate in emergency services missions during a declared disaster upon request from their unit commander with approval from the chief administrative officer of the state agency."

On the federal level, Birt worked extremely hard over multiple weeks to ensure that the wing met with 100% of its congressional delegation during CAP's annual National Legislative Day (NLD) Hybrid Campaign. He organized, managed, and was a member of the New York Wing team that conducted 29 virtual meetings with members of Congress. Birt ensured that each meeting was staffed with members, to include cadets, which represented CAP in a professional manner and could tell our story. He provided pre-meeting guidance and training to a team of 14 senior and 8 cadet members, ensuring that they were briefed on the purpose and scope of NLD, and had all the necessary materials to ensure success. Birt also provided briefing materials to each congressional office ahead of the scheduled meetings, which greatly eased the conversations. In addition, he personally followed up with each of the 29 offices.

This year marked the first time ever that the wing achieved 100% in meeting with its congressional delegation. This achievement is due in large part to the efforts of Birt and the immense amount of time he put into the 2021 NLD campaign. Birt's efforts were exceptionally noteworthy due to the result. CAP was seeking congressional support for an over \$60 million appropriation request. On the morning of NLD, there was still no member that agreed to be the lead on a letter of support to the Defense Appropriations Sub-Committee in support of CAP. Due to the efforts of the Birt and the New York Wing team that day, not only did Congresswoman Claudia Tenney (NY-22) agree to lead the letter, she agreed to personally engage her colleagues in the House of Representatives to support it. New York Wing received high praise from CAP's national government relations director, John Swain, for their efforts to get a member to not only lead the letter, but also aggressively campaign for co-sponsors. Swain stated that more than 80 members endorsed the letter, the most of any previous year. Several other members of New York's congressional delegation sent single letters of support to the sub-committee. Swain called New York's efforts "instrumental and outstanding."